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ABSTRACT

The focus in this issue of the Illinois English Bulletin is on student writing in the high school and college years. The lead article reports on a University of Illinois committee on the use of English, which reviewed both the writing abilities of incoming freshmen and the provisions for further instruction in writing throughout the undergraduate program. Other articles in this issue discuss ideas for involving students in their writing, approaches to writing, advice for teachers of writing, a message from the chairperson of a committee judging poetry written in Illinois schools, and the presentation speech for the Illinois Author of the Year (historian Victor Hicken). (AA)

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Student Writing: The Problem and Some Solutions

A Committee Reports on the Use of English

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It is the academic natural law: when colleges or universities face difficult problems, they instinctively form committees. Cynics (they call themselves "realists") insist that these committees are designed to help administrators avoid rather than solve the problems at hand. If they are right, the *ad hoc* Committee on the Use of English at the Urbana-Champaign Campus of the University of Illinois is surely an anomaly. Given what is perhaps the hottest educational issue today — writing skills, the Committee not only met regularly but also reported quickly with specific, even daring recommendations for improvement of student writing. The local cynics were confounded.

Acknowledging national and local complaints about student writing skills, Robert W. Rogers, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Urbana-Champaign, appointed a Committee on the Use of English in September, 1975, to study the "problem." Dean Rogers made no pretense about the difficulty of the task he set the Committee; indeed, his charge to it was especially blunt:

> The problem is obviously a complex one: there is little in contemporary society that encourages either literacy or skill in written communication in the college-age group. Public schools appear to have abandoned the effort; and, it must be confessed, there is little insistence on the part of the faculty to promote high standards of language among our students, even in the humanities and social sciences.

Chaired by Associate Dean Roger K. Applebee and composed of professors from the Chemistry, Communications, History, Microbiology, Rhetoric, and Sociology divisions of the University, the Committee thus had fair warning both of the complexity of the situation and of the broad responsibility for its existence. During the next year, the Committee met some twenty-seven times, and

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after intense study of the University's entrance requirements, writing courses, and general academic policies made its "Report on the Status of Student Writing" to Dean Rogers.

For some years, the Urbana-Champaign Campus has gloried in the comparative superiority of its entering freshmen and graduating seniors to their national counterparts. While not unwarranted, this self-congratulation tends to obscure the truth about the students' actual skills, especially their verbal skills. Thus, for example, the mean ACT-English score for freshmen entering the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences this year (23.07) is about six points above the national mean; but, in recent years, the mean ACT-English score has declined about thirty percent faster for Urbana-Champaign freshmen than for their national counterparts. If freshmen entering all colleges of the University are considered, the situation is even worse. A CEEB verbal skills test administered to all entering freshmen between 1968 and 1974 showed a fifty-eight point decline in the average scores over that six year period; the average students missed ten more questions in 1974 than in 1968. Even the so-called "best" students are no longer quite so good. The number of Urbana-Champaign freshmen receiving "Advance Placement" credit for English and Rhetoric has declined this fall to a low thirty-three percent of those submitting test results through Princeton's Educational Testing Service. In a recent study of writing samples taken from close to two hundred freshmen with 27 ACT-English scores, only eight percent were found to have reasonable command of five basics of expository writing — thesis statement, sentence structure, paragraph development and coherence, overall logic and development, and usage skills. Superior by comparison though they be, therefore, the verbal skills of freshmen entering the Urbana-Champaign Campus are in truth not what they used to be.

Statistics like these raised questions in the Committee on the Use of English about entrance requirements. The present requirement of three units of high school English was apparently unsatisfactory as a guarantee of a high level of verbal or writing skill. Yet, figures showing that a large proportion of Liberal Arts and Sciences College freshmen had already taken four units before entry seemed to indicate that merely raising the number of English units required would be an inadequate response to the problem. The nature as well as the number of these English units thus became the Committee's dual focus.

The Committee as a whole found initially that it knew little about the nature of current high school English curricula. Con-

sequently, while making no pretense to a detailed study of such curricula, it sought some perspective on them through sources both without and within the University and the Committee. Information provided by Robert Hogan and Edmund Farrell, Executive Secretary and Associate Executive Secretary respectively of the National Council of Teachers of English; Alan Purves, Professor of Education at the University and associate of the National Assessment of Educational Progress; Dorothy Matthews, Associate Professor of English at the University and Director of English Undergraduate Studies; Roger Applebee, researcher of high school English programs and Chairperson of the Committee; and James Scanlon, Chairperson of Freshman Rhetoric at the University, Treasurer of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English, and a member of the Committee helped it to understand recent trends and current practices in high schools both in the nation and, especially, in Illinois.

From that understanding, the Committee proceeded to recommend changes not only in the number but also in the nature of the English entrance requirements. In the Committee's view, diversification of English curricula over the last ten years had unnecessarily and unwisely pushed expository writing into a distinctly subordinate position in high school programs. Some curricula in fact now offer no single course in expository writing to college-bound students and can give no guarantee that expository writing is an important element in any courses. Rather than adding to basic English courses, therefore, new courses developed in the last decade often substitute for them; far from providing true diversity, these new courses create another curricular homogeneity — one without expository writing. To allow students time for a truly diverse high school English program and to insure the place of expository writing in it, the Committee recommended that "four units of high school English (rather than three)" be required of those seeking admission to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and that "Work offered to meet this requirement . . . be comprised of studies in language, composition, and literature" and "in all such work significant attention . . . be given to expository writing."

At the same time, the Committee saw the need for better screening of applicants to be sure their verbal and writing skills are adequate. Extant objective tests, whatever their strengths, were thought insufficient by themselves as reliable measures of writing skill. It was hoped that in the long run the University would develop its own verbal and writing tests for admission and even

placement after admission. In the interim, however, the Committee made three specific recommendations related to pre-admission testing. First, because SAT seems a more useful assessment of general verbal skills and because SAT will soon include a composition subsection with a writing sample test, the Committee urged that admission decisions be based in part on SAT-Verbal scores and not as now on ACT-English scores. Second, because objective tests are clearly not the best measure of writing ability, the Committee suggested that all applicants be required to submit "writing samples on at least two topics . . . written under examination conditions when students take the comprehensive entrance test." Third, because regularly admitted students no matter how capable in other academic areas must be "literate," the Committee proposed that "a minimum score on the verbal portion(s) of the required admission test . . . be determined, and no candidate . . . be admitted who does not meet this minimal requirement."

But the Committee was not solely concerned with the "literacy" of incoming freshmen; more important to it in fact were the verbal or writing skills of graduating seniors. A faculty questionnaire done specifically for the Committee revealed that fully fifty percent of those responding found the writing ability of present undergraduates in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences "somewhat worse" or "significantly worse" than that of students five or six years previous. Both the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) confirm the faculty's general sense that Urbana-Champaign students have verbal or writing skills problems. While in 1975 the general mean LSAT scores of local students placed them in the seventy-third percentile nationally, the part of the test which measures verbal skills placed them in only the sixty-first percentile. The MCAT results for the same year showed even more phenomenal discrepancies between non-verbal and verbal skills: mean scores on the quantitative and scientific parts of the test placed local students in the ninety-seventh and ninety-eighth percentiles nationally; mean scores on the verbal part placed them a full twenty points below those percentiles in the seventy-eighth percentile. While admittedly this imbalance in skills was apparent at admission — higher mathematical and scientific skills (on the average about four ACT points higher) than verbal skills, the students' tenure at the University apparently did little to right the imbalance.

Figures like these brought questions in the Committee about present Urbana-Champaign writing courses. Given the skills of incoming freshmen and graduating seniors, the sufficiency of a

one semester composition course taught essentially by a part-time teaching assistant staff which changed completely over a five year period was a question of particular concern. The amount of moral and material support given writing programs by their parent departments was likewise a matter of intense discussion. Finally, the desirability of increased articulation between writing programs and interested groups within and without the University was considered. In each of these areas the Committee made recommendations for change, some for substantial change.

To begin with, the Committee gave close scrutiny to the Rhetoric Program, since almost eighty percent of the freshmen fulfil the University's composition requirement there. It then endorsed continuation of the basic one-semester course with but one important modification: in order to give the course more time to develop basic expository writing skills, it suggested removing the course's research and bibliographic skills component. Therefore, the Committee urged, "Writing courses appropriate to particular disciplines . . . should be developed with the primary objective of instructing students in the writing of research papers and reports." These courses would be developed "cooperatively between faculty in the respective departments and specialists in the Department of English," and would be taken by students once they have opted for their majors. The Committee hoped that these second courses would answer the clear need for writing courses beyond the freshman level appropriate to students' majors — a need also seen by fifty-nine percent of the Liberal Arts and Sciences College seniors responding to a questionnaire designed for the Committee. It was also hoped that the cooperation between the Rhetoric Program and other departments required to develop these second writing courses would advance the case for increased attention to expository writing skills in the College generally.

While the Committee likewise endorsed the present training program for teaching assistants in Rhetoric, it coupled that endorsement with a blunt insistence on greater participation by English Department faculty in teaching composition: "At least 3.0 professorial FTE [three full-time professors or up to nine part-time professors] should be committed to the program." In addition, whether faculty or non-tenured but permanent staff, the Committee recommended "developing a cadre of teachers to assist in the supervision and coordination" of the Rhetoric Program. Both these recommendations were designed primarily to give greater continuity and stability to a program which is now staffed by a competent though temporary group of ninety-six

teaching assistants. Beyond this, the Committee's assumption was that significant faculty involvement would enhance the Program's self-image, its image with the students, and its image among the professorial ranks of the English Department.

Composition programs have traditionally been the unloved stepchildren of their parent departments — witness an interesting article entitled "The Higher Illiteracy" in a recent *Harper's*. The Urbana-Champaign English Department, for example, presently has but two faculty members administering a Rhetoric Program which serves five thousand students a year. The Committee thus found it necessary to exhort the Departments of English and Speech Communications (which serves about a thousand students in its composition courses) to provide "additional support for . . . administration and supervision" of their writing programs. In fact, the Committee decided that the present health of the Freshman Rhetoric Program "was owing primarily to the extraordinary efforts of a few individuals who seem to give a great deal more by way of service to the program than they receive in tangible rewards." The Committee was compelled to insist, therefore, that in the future faculty committed to the Program "be rewarded by promotion and appropriate salary increases on the basis of their performance." In short, composition programs should no longer be unloved stepchildren.

Beyond these matters internal to Urbana-Champaign writing programs, the Committee explored the need for expanded articulation between these programs and interested groups within and without the University. Hence, it recommended construction of guides and style sheets "to accommodate differing modes and requirements of the different disciplinary areas" within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. More significantly, perhaps, the Committee also urged creation of a college-level committee both to "monitor the required writing programs" and to "provide liaison with other units in the College or the University." Finally, the Committee encouraged writing programs to organize additional workshops and summer institutes for teachers of writing at all educational levels. These recommendations are designed to broaden the perspectives of all those involved, especially those connected with writing courses at the University. The ultimate beneficiaries, of course, will be the students.

The last area to receive the Committee's attention was that amorphous category termed "general academic policies." Once again, certain statistics which came to its attention stimulated recommendations for change. The very same student question-

naire which revealed great support among graduating seniors for a writing course beyond the basic freshman course also indicated a "failure on the part of many undergraduate programs to give appropriate emphasis to student writing." Students surveyed recorded paltry averages of .52 papers in 100 level, .64 papers in 200 level, and 1.0 papers in 300 level courses outside the English and Speech Communications Departments. Thus, despite the recognition of fully fifty percent of the faculty that students' writing skills were either "somewhat worse" or "significantly worse" than those of their counterparts five or six years previous, few professors apparently assigned much writing in their courses. The Committee had a great deal of consciousness raising to do.

Convinced that the Urbana-Champaign composition programs alone could not shoulder the burden of improving writing skills, the Committee addressed its final recommendations generally to the humanities, social sciences, and life sciences. In particular, the Committee urged "more extensive use of written English on student reports, papers and examinations . . . by all departments." This recommendation was coupled with a suggestion to Dean Rogers that all annual reports from departments "include statements summarizing efforts undertaken to improve the quantity and quality of student writing." Because of its potential influence on student writing skills beyond required composition courses, this last recommendation is perhaps the Committee's most important. And yet, because it depends on the good will and effort of so many, it will perhaps be the most difficult to effect.

In a real sense, however, all the recommendations of the Committee on the Use of English depend on the good will and effort of many. As Dean Rogers indicated in his charge to the Committee, the writing skills problem is indeed "a complex one": just as responsibility for the problem is broad, so responsibility for its solution is broad. Those same cynics who at first insisted that the Committee was designed to avoid not solve the writing skills problem have begun to insist that no one will heed its report. It remains to be seen whether they will turn out to be "confounded" cynics or "realists" this time.

Writing Activities to Open Up a Literary Work

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As English teachers, we continually strive to lead our students to meaningful contacts with works of literature; time and time again, we look for opportunities to increase student understanding and pleasure during reading. Too often, however, we overlook — perhaps even dismiss as counter-productive — the use of writing activities to bring about such meaningful contacts. Literature teachers would do well, I suggest, to consider the range of possible contacts that can result from students' writing about literature *before* they read and discuss it, *while* they are reading and discussing it, and *after* they have read and discussed it. Writing about short works (poems, short stories, essays, etc.) will generally be done after the reading, but occasionally before. With longer works (plays, novels, etc.), the writing may occur, of course, before, during, and after the reading and discussion-analysis.

With both high school and college readers of literature, I have successfully utilized writing activities from a range of five possible types — activities which I catalog as (1) pre-reading involvement writing; (2) post-reading, pre-analysis writing; (3) during-the-analysis writing; (4) post-analysis, pre-synthesis writing; and (5) post-synthesis writing. (Student teachers with whom I have worked have also reported similar classroom successes with writing activities from these five categories.)

Pre-reading Involvement Writing

As the rubric indicates, pre-reading involvement writing, applicable to either short or longer literary pieces, is done before the students read a literary selection, and its intent is motivational. Such writing (perhaps evolving from preliminary class discussion) concerns a theme, or subject, or significant experience in the selection-to-be-read. For example, if students are to read James Hurst's short story "The Scarlet Ibis" with its themes of pride, of childhood cruelty, and of the love-hate ambivalence in sibling relationships, the pre-reading writing activity would coa-

cern some aspect of these themes as they relate to the readers'-to-be backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, etc. Having completed such writing activities, students, when they read the selection, inherently make associative connections between themselves and the characters in the story, between their experiences and the events of the story. Thus, one kind of meaningful contact with literature has been made through writing.

Post-reading, Pre-analysis Writing

Post-reading, pre-analysis writing is utilized after the students have completed the reading of a short selection or the reading of all or part (a section, an act, a chapter) of a longer selection. The writing, completed before any analysis of the selection in class, indicates to the teacher what the students have made of the selection on their own — their perceptions of what happened, the significance they attach to what happened, their feelings about what happened, etc. When the teacher reads these post-reading, pre-analysis writings, he/she becomes aware of what the students have understood about the selection, what they are uncertain about, and what they, in fact, have misunderstood or distorted. These writings, therefore, indicate to the teacher the direction to take during subsequent class analysis and other learning activities. There is no need, for example, to discuss and analyze what the students have rightly made of the selection; the subsequent learning activities can focus on those elements of the selection about which the students' post-reading, pre-analysis writings reveal less certainty, partial distortion, or, even, gross misconceptions. Also, these writings reveal the aspects of the selection most immediately interesting and relevant to the students. Finally, they may show who has and who has not read the selection. Most important in all this is the fact that post-reading, pre-analysis writing activities give clues to what the teacher needs to do next to increase students' meaningful contacts with literature.

In using post-reading pre-analysis writings, I have found that students prefer a choice of three or four issues about which to write, and that at least one of the questions should be within the range of capabilities of the less perceptive readers in the class. Also, so that the student writings give evidence of what students have made of the whole selection, the questions should be broad in scope; that is, the questions should require the students to consider the selection as a whole.

During-the-analysis Writing

For the teacher who combines the reading of a longer selection with concurrent class discussion and analysis, numerous writing activities are possible, ranging from reproductive to analytical to original writing. A decade ago Bertrand Evans in *Teaching Shakespeare in the High School* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966) outlined these types of during-the-analysis writing activities to use in the study of Shakespeare. English teachers, I suggest, can adapt Evans' categories to the works of other authors and, as I have done, can add other types to Evans' suggestions. Evans delineates three forms of reproductive writing: (1) the paraphrase, or close, literal restatement of the substance of lines or passages; (2) the précis, or summary of the essential thought of a passage; and (3) the narrative summary, or the retelling of the action or story line. These types of writing about literature are, of course, aimed to insure exact understanding. As important as this aim is, these writings reproducing the original, if used extensively, may diminish or even destroy the pleasures of reading. They are used best, I think, with students who have trouble making "plain sense" of the selection and/or struggle to keep the sequence of story events in order.

Evans' second category of during-the-analysis writing activities, some form of actual analysis, involves commenting upon the original or probing it for meanings. Most of us have used these kinds of writing activities with our students — analyzing character change and the forces promoting it, the use of minor characters as foils, the internal and external nature of the conflict, the types of characters in a selection and how they are presented, the function of setting and the use of time, ideas or themes in the selection, aspects of style, etc.

Perhaps we have used too often these primarily cognitive analyses as the sole basis for writing about literature and have excluded other writing options that also may lead to students' meaningful contacts with literature, sometimes more pleasurable ones. Too often, also, I suggest, we have made these writing activities too structured. Long before a particular issue, potentially ripe for analysis, emerges without teacher design during class discussion, teachers predetermine that they will have students write about that issue when the discussion reaches that point. What works better, I think, is not to predetermine totally what issues will be included in during-the-analysis writing activities; better results come when the issue-topics naturalistically grow out of the dis-

cussion. As students reach the point in the discussion when several viewpoints are being explored, supported, refuted — that's the time to say, "Why not take a few moments now to write down what you think about this."

Evans' third category of during-the-analysis writing, some form of original writing, utilizes a particular point in the literary selection as a "springboard." A line, an idea, a situation, or a problem is used as a stimulus, and the students take the issue, thus raised, out of its literary context and write about it in terms of their own background, experience, knowledge, or attitudes. In other words, students use the literary selection as "springboard" to a consideration of what the literary selection suggests to the reader — about human relations, decisions, self, etc.

One effective way to handle these springboard writings, I suggest, is to use the journal. As students read and analyze a play or novel, they can record in journal entries their reactions to characters and what they do. Or, students can respond in their journals to specific questions raised by the teacher, preferably controversial questions that ask students to judge and evaluate particular actions or ideas of characters, the narrator, or the author.

Occasionally, as a during-the-analysis writing activity, students might be asked to do adaptations. For example, an incident presented in a short story in narrative summary form may be rewritten in dramatic scene form. Or, the reverse may be done — from dramatic scene to narrative summary. Similarly, a scene from a short story may be converted to TV or movie script. Another such activity, partly creative, is to have students do parodies. Regardless of the type, these writing activities help to keep relevant the material being read and analyzed.

Post-analysis, Pre-synthesis Writing

After the reading-analysis of the literary selection, literature teachers can use a post-analysis, pre-synthesis writing activity as one of several culminating activities to the study of a longer literary selection; its intent is evaluative, at least in part. This writing activity reveals what the students have gained from the period of reading-analysis. It should reveal to what extent the students have been involved meaningfully in the analysis and, also, whether they can now synthesize what has been analyzed. Incidentally, it provides an opportunity for students to practice such synthesis. Too often, we as teachers do this for our students, as we tie together the various strands of the discussion-analysis, or as we piece to-

gether the parts that form the whole of the literary selection. Students ought to do this on their own, at least occasionally. If the period of analysis has been productive, there ought, I think, to be observable differences between what the students have done on the earlier post-reading, pre-analysis writing activity and what they do with the post-analysis, pre-synthesis writing activity.

For this post-analysis, pre-synthesis writing assignment, I use a choice of three or four topics, with some range of difficulty and complexity. Any student with at least general understanding of the literary selection ought to be able to answer one of the questions, with the writing done in class and with students using open books. Frequently, I alert students to possible ideas for these post-analysis, pre-synthesis writings during the analysis stage of study; students may thus tentatively gather material for the writing activity during the analysis. By doing this, the process of synthesis evolves naturally from that of analysis, and the two are not artificially and arbitrarily separated.

When I read the students' individual post-analysis, pre-synthesis papers, I note what issues about the selection still need clarification or amplification, despite all that may have been said during the analysis. These clarifications are then made, partially, in my terminal comments on the students' papers and, more importantly, when I return the papers. With the class, I hold a final synthesizing session.

Post-synthesis Writing

After the final synthesis, teachers can provide opportunities for post-synthesis writing, usually some extended form of Evans' so-called springboard pieces, and usually elective assignments. In contrast to the during-the-analysis springboard writings which focus on a line, an idea, a situation, or a problem at a particular point in the literary selection, these post-synthesis pieces focus on broad issues; that is, they tend to evolve from broader aspects of the selection as a whole. Also, while the during-the-analysis springboard pieces tend to be short paragraphs, the post-synthesis writings are longer and require fuller organization and development. Finally, these pre-synthesis pieces are, literally, more creative and move more fully away from the context of the selection that has been read. The focus falls not on the literature but on the students' lives.

In conclusion, having students write about literature *before* they read it, *while* they read and analyze it, and *after* they have read

and discussed it can bring youthful readers to grapple actively with the issues at the heart of the material read. Writing can join with reading and with discussion-analysis to effect fuller, more meaningful and, hopefully, more pleasurable contacts with literature.

Anybody Can Write a Poem

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"We aren't going to have to write poems, are we?" The inevitable response to my announcement that we are beginning a poetry unit. My answer is "No, but we are going to fool around with words." Most of my students have "written" poems before — following models, the approved technique of creative writing textbooks. They have struggled with the haiku, the cinquain, the sonnet, the tanka (whatever that is), and so on. And they have become convinced that poetry is the triumph of form over function. Or they have resisted form totally and clung to the notion that "poetry is saying just what you feel."

I'm sad
And it's really too bad.

I believe that writing poetry is one of the best ways to understand poetry — to grasp the creative process; one must, to some extent, arrive at an identification with this process. Form *is* important. But form must grow out of an individual perception and the attempt to communicate the essence of that perception. The first thing a young writer must learn is concentration. If concentration does not fail, the *sine qua non* of a poem — sincerity — will be there. From that point on, the writer can "play around with words" until he is able to satisfy his imaginary audience.

All this is, of course, at some remove from the experiences and skills of the average eleventh grader. For this reason I have evolved some techniques designed to show the students, through direct experience, that what goes on in their minds in many ways parallels the thought processes of the serious artist. One such technique is the creation of an oral poem by the entire class, on the theme "Love is . . ." or "Freedom is . . . ." Another is the use

of word-association tests to help the students see the organic and tangential relationships between words, images, and metaphors. The exercise with which I usually begin my discussion of poetry is one which I call (to myself) "anybody can write a poem." Although I have used this exercise in my creative writing classes, it has proved even more successful with "average ability" students than with advanced students. The object of the exercise is not a polished "product," but the involvement of the student in the creative process.

I begin by arranging the desks in a circle, surrounding a table. After telling the students that they will be doing some free writing, I take a number of objects from a brown paper bag and place them on the table. The students are to choose an object and examine it closely. (They can move around, pick up the objects one by one, etc.) Each student then writes about his/her chosen object for twenty or thirty minutes. I suggest that they first attempt to describe the object as carefully as possible; then to write down randomly whatever associations come to their minds. Organization, sentence structure, and grammar are not important; in fact, I discourage any kind of formal introduction and structure. I simply ask the students to concentrate as intensely as possible on what they are doing.

The objects can be divided into two categories. The first category is that of familiar objects, having many associations in the students' minds. I have used an apple, a pencil, a seashell, a ball of string, a flower in a vase, a wine bottle, a sponge. The second category consists of objects possibly unfamiliar to students and less identifiable as to function. Here I have used a fossil, an old sheep's horn, abstract bronze and ceramic sculptures, a blown glass vase full of bubbles and whorls, a silver gnome riding a tricycle. Neither of these categories seems superior to the other in stimulating close observation and imaginative response. Students who choose an object in the first category are attempting to find the unusual in something ordinary; students choosing an object in the second category are attempting to bring the unknown into the realm of their own experience (shades of Wordsworth and Coleridge). I think it is important to have objects from both categories, since some students feel threatened being asked to write about something they do not understand. It is also important for the students to feel that this assignment will not be graded, at least not in the conventional way.

After the students have turned their papers in, I go over each paper with a series of colored marking pens. I underline different levels of response with different colored ink. The three main types of response that I differentiate are (1) images, (2) associations, and (3) ideas. An image response is a direct description of the object, possibly including a comparison of the object to something else. An associative response may be a "group" connotation suggested by the object; that is, a connotation shared by a number of people. (For example: "apple" suggests "Johnny Appleseed.") Or a student may make an associative response relating to his own individual experience ("... we were throwing this apple around and something funny happened to it"). An idea response is a conceptualization and abstraction growing out of the other types of response and is often far removed from the object itself.

I type out and xerox a series of responses to several of the objects. Here is a series of responses to a white clamshell:

Image: smooth, shaped like a fan, grooves going in a semicircle, layered like a surface with part of the paint chipped off, color a worn white, splotches of orange, shaped like a small dish

Association: fish living in ocean, a beach far away with mountains behind it, stream of cool water that flows through the cave and comes from a waterfall, the waves crashed into shore, cool spray that touches your face, some lonely human being walking along the beach, a child delighted at the pretty seashell

Idea: people have their sharp edges worn smooth with time, an example of God's creation, a quiet part of life

(All these examples are taken from an average-level junior class. Most of these students will not attend college.)

Finally, I take four or five individual papers, from which I select words and phrases to arrange on the page — producing something like a poem. All the words are the students' own; the selection and arrangement are mine. These "poems" are then xeroxed.

(Apple)

An apple is a lot like a rose
Both red
Both have a fragrant smell
A rose just sits there.
The apple won't move unless it is moved.
It is a perfect natural thing.
So is the rose.

(Ball of String)

It looks like
a very skinny snake
thread on a bobbin with a hole in the middle
spaghetti
You can
tie it on your finger
measure things with it
play "cup and saucer" with it
tie a splint on a bird's broken leg
and then the bird can use it for its nest
Your cat can play with it.
But when it gets in a knot — yuck!

(Sponge)

Squeezable
Cheese
What did sponges do when they were alive?
Did they swim around or lie like rocks
at the bottom of the ocean?
Did they have baby sponges?

(Flowers)

Green leaves
Funny, fuzzy
Soft, squiggly
Red, orange
Pink, crimson
Pleasant. Touch
Not flowers
Red flames
Orange flames
Pink flames
Crimson flames
Spilled blood
On green leaves.

I use these xeroxed examples as the basis for class discussion the following day. The students are usually pleased and surprised at the clarity of their own images, once their sentences have been "pared down." They begin to understand something of the aesthetic principle of selection, and something of the power of a striking image or metaphor. Since they have themselves followed the path

from object to image to association, it is easier for them to understand the structure of a poem. And the concepts of connotation and metaphor are made real to them.

What really astonishes the students are their own "poems." Although they are not, needless to say, great art, they are the result of imagination imposed on experience. In a small way, the students have participated in the creative process. Many of them continue to "fool around with words," to select, to arrange, to search for a form. And in this way they learn something about their language, about the world around them, and about themselves.

"Dear Editor": A Most Rewarding Unit

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THORNTON COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL
HARVEY

A unit that has elicited lively discussion from the start and has culminated in sincere, carefully worded essays is the letter-to-the-editor unit that has been an integral part of my course of study for English II. This unit has become one of the real highlights of the school year, not only for my students but for me as well.

I begin the unit by having the students read or listen to and then discuss some actual letters that I have managed to save. Some of these are addressed to the editor of a community newspaper; others, to the editor of the school newspaper. Having exposed the students to a variety of letters, I attempt to lead them to some conclusions about the purposes of letters to editors. Generally, the students arrive at a list of purposes something like this:

1. To call attention to some matter or problem
2. To seek answers, solutions
3. To offer answers, solutions
4. To agree with, support an idea, plan, etc.
5. To disagree with, object to an idea, plan, etc.
6. To criticize, complain, denounce
7. To praise, compliment, congratulate, express gratitude

Of course, a letter may accomplish more than one of these aims.

Our next step is to determine the kinds of topics dealt with in letters to editors. At this point I set up two columns on the chalk-

board, one for the community paper and one for the school paper. Obviously it is a waste of time to spend all period listing topics; therefore, I halt the proceedings after the class has listed perhaps five to ten for each type of paper. By this time the students have become well aware of the large variety of topics. They are easily able to add others of their own.

Once the students understand the purposes of these letters and realize the wide choice of subjects from which to choose for the letters they will write, it is time to take up such matters as length and form. I stress that newspaper space is hard to come by and that editors appreciate letters that are concise. Hence, I set the length of the students' letters at one, two, or three paragraphs. As far as form is concerned, the students need to know how to write the heading, salutation, and closing. Because there are always some students who do not want their names to appear in print, I take a few minutes to explain that all letters must be signed but that anyone can direct the editor to withhold the name.

Having spent one or two periods preparing to write, the students are now ready to compose their letters. They write to the editor of their choice for whatever purpose they feel to be appropriate. I insist that the topics they choose be topics about which they are somewhat informed and have a definite viewpoint. I allow them a period to get started and a period to finish. Whatever they write on their own time between sessions is entirely up to them. (I encourage them to decide for themselves whether they need to work on the assignment at home.) During the time they write in class I allow them to exchange and discuss each other's letters. Naturally I assist those who need help, but I try my utmost to keep my adult, teacher, and middle-class prejudices about certain topics to myself.

After I have read the letters and made temporary evaluations, I decide what follow-up activities before final revision would be most beneficial. One possibility is to have a number of letters read aloud. Another is to ditto several for the class to read. Still another is to prepare transparencies of some letters for the overhead projector. The method I use depends upon the nature of the class, the amount of time I have for preparation, and, to some extent, my mood at the time. Once the students have heard or read the letters of their classmates, I ask them to discuss why the letters are effective. I focus the discussion chiefly on unity of theme and tone, clarity and adequate development of ideas, and evidence of the writer's knowing the subject. Upon completion of the discussion, I ask the students to revise and rewrite with an eye to hav-

ing their letters submitted for publication. It is not surprising that when the final copies come in the next day, they are so well written that I am able to make permanent evaluations with minimal effort.

The climax of the unit is sending the letters to the editors. I tell the students that I cannot guarantee that any letter will be printed. However, since the school and community papers traditionally provide more than adequate space for letters, there is a good chance that some of the boys and girls will one day turn to the editorial page and find their own words.

Some of the students, as a rule, do not want to be published, and naturally not all who desire to be will realize their ambition. Consequently, I ask each student to make an extra copy of his/her letter so that I may post it on the bulletin board or read it aloud. Such recognition, I find, boosts the spirits of a good many young people.

I feel that the unit is worthwhile for several reasons. First, it provides students with an opportunity to express their views on topics of genuine concern. Second, the students seem to put considerable thought and effort into their compositions when they realize that they are writing not just for an audience of one teacher or even one class, but for an audience school-wide or community-wide in nature. Finally, it seems to me that perhaps the basic purpose and real value in having the students write such letters is to make them aware that in our society the individual's voice can still be heard and that speaking out is not merely a privilege but, in reality, a responsibility.

The following are letters that have been printed in local newspapers within the last two years. Writing of this quality from so-called "average" and "slow" students makes me wonder about the validity of such labels.

From The Star-Tribune

He Was Lucky, But Others . . .

Dear Sir,

The letter I'm writing concerns all the citizens of Dixmoor. There are two railroad crossings in Dixmoor, none of which has gates or signals. The locations are 143rd and Lincoln and 143rd and Robey.

Now, there have already been a number of accidents at these locations, one involving a bus load of elementary students. But, on 4-25-72, approximately 8:05 p.m., I myself was almost involved in an accident with a train. There

were no warning lights, gates or horn. There are two tracks on 143rd and Robey and I had already crossed one, when all of a sudden, I saw the train. Luckily, I had not yet reached the track it was on so I had just enough time to back up.

Now, I was lucky, but others might not be. So, I hope this serious problem will be taken care of right away.

Ron Thompson
14216 Page
Dixmoor

They Can't Smoke, We Can't Either

Dear Editor,

I am writing to let you know that Thornton high school is opening a student lounge and it is for seniors only. I think this is not fair. They will not be allowed to do anything that other students are not to do. They can't smoke or drink and neither can we. So, I feel that freshman, sophomores and juniors should be able to use the lounge, also.

Name Withheld by Request

Parking Lot Problems, Too

Dear Sir,

The City of Harvey's parking lot is located on 146th and Clinton, which is used by the commuters of the Illinois Central railroad.

There seem to be two problems with the parking lot. One is the dust caused by the cars when they enter and exit the parking lot during the dry months of the year. The people who live by the parking lot get so much grime and dirt through their open windows.

The other problem is during the rainy and snowy months. The people have to swim to the train and back to their cars because the parking lot becomes flooded. The chuckholes fill with water and appear to be lakes and swamps.

There are 106 parking meters and a quarter is put in them each working day of the week. The money collected comes out to $6,890 a year. The parking lot has been there for a number of years. I know the city of Harvey has to pay taxes on the parking lot, but I think the City of Harvey can afford to blacktop the parking lot. I am sure people who live in the neighborhood and the commuters will agree with me.

Debra Flanagan
14615 Jefferson
Harvey

From the Advertiser

Dear Editor,

I have a complaint about the garbage disposal in Dolton. The garbage men should come twice a week to provide more room in the cans for people's garbage.

One more thing — the garbage men should give a little more care to the garbage cans, because when they put the garbage in the truck they dent and mash up the cans so you can't even get the tops on.

Yours truly,
Richard Means

Balancing Form and Content

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DOWNERS GROVE

The decline in writing skills has received the bulk of recent attention among both high school and college educators. To halt this deterioration of language skills, cries are raised for more "discipline" in writing and for the re-assertion of "rigorous standards." In short, we seem to be in the midst of a swing back toward traditional, formalistic concepts in the teaching of composition.

Only three or four years ago, other forces of reform held sway over teachers of writing. Led by Ken Macrorie, author of *Telling Writing*, teachers exhorted students to trust their own insights and to write honestly instead of elegantly. Convinced that form is organic, they encouraged "free" writing, which would cohere of itself in creating a formal logic. Outlines were forgotten, since no self-respecting "real writer" uses one. Original ideas counted for more than symmetrical paragraph structure. In summary, the emphasis then called for a shift from form to content.

Recently, however, both high school and college English departments have grown alarmed at the amount of "free" writing which is incoherent and the degree to which "honesty" has become an excuse for self-indulgence. Parents and employers have joined in asking what happened to the old expository values of symmetry, organization, cohesion, and stylistic objectivity. Once again, knowledge of sentence structure is believed essential to good writing, and practice in punctuation necessary for a sense of style. One must outline in order to achieve coherent organization. Three methods of development are stressed: chronological, cause-and-effect, and least to most important. Papers are often graded *C* over *M*, content over mechanics.

The assumption behind these traditional techniques has always been that by working from the outside, by stressing form, the students' thoughts would automatically fall into line. But in swinging back to this belief, we risk forgetting the most important lesson which Macrorie and others tried to impress on us: overemphasis on form strangles creativity and original thought. No amount of smooth transitions and subtle turns of phrase can salvage a paper filled with cliches, incompetent reasoning, and needlessly academic language. In the final analysis, writing which lacks the stamp of its writer's personality and original thought is a paper without content.

Instead of a return to the almost-entirely formalistic objectives of the traditional approach, we need new ways which will help students to develop and evaluate the content of their writing, while continuing to mature in their grasp of the formal aspects. In striking this balance, I have found Catherine Minteer's *Words and What They Do To You* invaluable. A semanticist, Minteer argues that to be valid, a statement must be specific, concrete, and factual. In explaining these concepts, she suggests techniques and activities which are solidly grounded in the experiences of high school students. To design the writing unit described below, I have combined her ideas with some of Macrorie's and with my own activity suggestions. To complete the unit, I add formal objectives found in most high school composition textbooks. Given this eclectic approach, students can pursue originality of thought and expression without ignoring organization, coherent sentence structure, and the conventions of usage.

Communication stops when people decide that no more can be said on a subject. On this insight rests what Minteer calls "the ETC.," the realization that since there are an infinite number of points of view on any given subject, something always remains to be said about that subject. Too often, both students and adults retreat from a deeper exploration of a topic, perhaps because we are all afraid old prejudices will be challenged, because we are lazy, because we do not have the self-confidence to question dearly-held beliefs. This retreat from a complete observation of both the world and ourselves constitutes the one largest obstacle to good writing.

As a result, I spend more time on "the ETC." than on any other concept in the writing unit. Different opportunities for simple observation are presented. In one, the students are given a sheet of paper with one hundred blanks on it and the name of a simple classroom object written at the top. They may not hand

the sheet in until they have filled the sheet with details observed about that object. I invent some role-play situation, involving three or four students, which the rest of the class watches. Again they list the factual things that they observe.

To work "the ETC." into writing, I turn to Macrorie. He starts by stimulating students to write off the top of their heads, free-form, following wherever the associations lead. The students write without worrying about grammar, spelling, sentence structure, or organization. But they have to get as much down as they can about the topic (or topics) they are writing about that day. The writing usually lasts about fifteen minutes and takes place on three or four days of each week. Hopefully, by delving more deeply into "the ETC.," the students can come closer to the truths of their experience.

From "the ETC." it is a short jump to defining the differences between generalities and specifics. I emphasize how empty words like "thing," "place," "person," and "event" can be. The reader needs to be put in the here-and-now through specifics, to realize that it is not just any old dog that is being described, but Pluto. To put the concept into practice, I have everyone in class bring a list of objects. These are read aloud, and the rest of the class attempts to categorize the items in the list. I describe different parts of an activity such as bowling. They try to guess what the entire action is. I say a general word like "book." Each member of the class tells what specific example comes to mind.

At this point in their writing, the students begin to sift and order their raw experience. A fairly structured assignment comes first. I write a paragraph filled with vague references to persons, places, and events. They must rewrite the paragraph, providing the specifics where general words are used. Then the students attempt, as Macrorie advises, to focus their free writing. I encourage them to let their experiences describe and flow out of some general feeling or idea, such as "life is rough" or "I had a lousy weekend." Main emphasis is always on their saying more, increasing the specific data in their writing, describing things as they happened.

The next point of emphasis is to make abstractions come alive through the use of concrete language. An abstraction, as I define it in class, is an idea or emotion, like love. A concrete word, on the other hand, represents an action, object, or person that can be perceived by the senses. The problem with abstract language is that it is imprecise, allowing great opportunity for mixed-up communication signals. In addition, abstract words are often fraught

with emotional overtones: "love," "hate," "peace," "authority," "democracy," "communism," and so on. Since we associate experiences with these abstract words, it is crucial that we specify what we mean by them through references to concrete experiences.

The students are immersed in activities which stress the differences between the two kinds of words. I hold up an abstract word on a flashcard, and they write down an experience that they are reminded of. I read off a list of experiences, and they write down one abstract word which seems to apply to all the experiences. I use song lyrics from Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Joni Mitchell, and discuss the different ways in which the songwriters attempt to define love, fear, and loneliness.

We concentrate entirely on concreteness of style in working the concept into writing. High school students especially fall into the trap of relying on all-inclusive, judgmental adjectives: "This is a *nice* town to live in," or "That was a real *good* book." I encourage them to replace such abstractions with words which appeal to the senses. "This story made my spine tingle," or "This story moved at a break-neck pace." I hand out a list of abstract sentences which they rewrite in concrete language. Artistic short films and evocative pictures challenge them to describe their feelings in experiential terms. At first, the students do rely on cliches. After a time, however, they begin to develop a style which is more vivid, more personal, and more original.

By this time, most students' writing should display a greater depth of experience and a more vivid, personal style in describing that experience. The last step, then, is to discuss and practice the ways in which opinions can be supported by facts. I define a fact as a statement proven to be true either through our senses or through inductive validation. An opinion is an inference or conclusion drawn from the facts, the way in which we interpret reality.

Before the class in which this concept is introduced, I get together with a student in the class and tell him/her to walk out when I am in the middle of talking. If he or she does so in a surly, disrespectful manner, better yet. The class, of course, jumps to all kinds of conclusions: he flunked English last quarter, he was kicked out of his house, and so on. The kid returns, all smiles, and explains the little plot. We then discuss what the rest of the class saw, the facts, and what they concluded, the opinions.

For the writing, different activities are presented in which the students must practice substantiating opinions with facts. On some assignments, personal experience will suffice. On others, anecdotes

and examples gathered from reading, television, friends, and relatives will provide good supporting material. In academic writing, facts, data, and observations are used to support conclusions. I state a judgment: "_____ is a lively place to live." We then go around the room and elicit as many experiences as we can that will substantiate the statement. I throw out a more objective kind of statement: "The _____ River is heavily polluted." To support this, they draw on both personal observation and media information. The older the students, the more able they will be to rely on information gathered from reading and television, and the further from immediate experience those beginning statements can be. Once the class gets the hang of it, I start with conclusions which they suggest.

Once students have mastered these skills in their writing, they are ready to go off in one of two directions. On one hand, they can follow Macrorie down the path of divergence, creativity, and subjectivity. On the other, they can explore ideas through the expository mode. If the latter path is chosen, traditional techniques can now be employed. I review outlining with the students, particularly as we get into more research-oriented topics. Outlining can also help them to break large ideas into more accessible sub-ideas, enabling them to go into greater depth. At this point also, I do instruction on effective sentence patterns, punctuation, and spelling. To make matters easier, each student already has a folder crammed with writing which is awaiting revision. Because the students have been working through content to form, the skills of organization and sentence structure seem less like pointless academic exercises, and more like means through which they can augment the effectiveness of what they are saying.

"The ETC." Specific. Concrete. Factual. By the end of the unit, I am hoping that it all adds up to clearness and vividness of style *and* of thought. Naturally, the students find it difficult to be specific, to relate their ideas to other people's realities. They find it even tougher to support their opinions, because their opinions are so seldom asked for. A girl in one of my classes this year wrote on an evaluation, "I get all the stuff you talked about, but I don't think I do it very well." Yes, it is hard "stuff" to get, and much practice is required before it is done very well. But the closer we come, the less room we leave for miscommunication, for imprecision, for cloudy thought. And the less we pollute our own language with a rhetoric born out of overemphasis on form.

Good Writing Takes Sweat

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RIVERSIDE

Put two English teachers together in an airport, on a bus, at a luncheon, and before ten minutes are up, the odds are they will be talking about the deplorable writing of high school and college students today. The fractured writing worries the teachers, worries the administrators, worries the parents, worries the public. But what about the students? Are they worried because they are not able to communicate in writing? For the most part, they are not. And it seems to me that this is the place to which our efforts must lead, that is, to placing the worry, the work, and the sweat where it belongs.

In recent years an emphasis on creativity and self-expression in the teaching of English has often resulted in an acceptance of disorganized and incoherent outpourings, stream-of-consciousness prose, and unstructured poetry. I accept it myself when I wish to encourage free expression. However, I am not teaching my students anything, and they and I both know it. Self-expression cannot be taught; communication can. Self-expression requires no discipline; communication does.

I like to use the fairy tale when I teach writing, not because good writing requires magic or a fairy godmother, but because fairy tales embody principles of communication that can be clearly explained by a teacher of English and easily put into practice by any literate student.

Fairy tales, unlike much modern writing, are concerned less with self-expression than with the primary purpose of tale-telling, whether oral or written, that is, of transmission of knowledge, information, moral principles, and folk or individual wisdom. They have a definite purpose; the narration proceeds through a series of three — three trials, three brothers, three sisters — to a resolution which clearly reaffirms the purpose. Each fairy tale forms a satisfying whole. The structure of the fairy tale can be applied to almost any type of expository writing.

At Riverside Brookfield High School when we observed, as elsewhere, a steady deterioration in writing skills, we decided to borrow from the fairy tales a basic structure, to teach this structure and to require mastery of it on a standardized basis. The structure we taught is nothing new, a five-paragraph essay with a

thesis statement, three supporting points, and a conclusion. What is new, I believe, is the requirement of the Sophomore Writing Test.

This test is taken on the same day by all sophomores, and the students really sweat to prepare for it. Three years ago when the English department first introduced this test, we had the requirement that the topic should be connected with the English curriculum. However, we found that the students were more successful writing according to their interests, so now we accept informative or persuasive essays on other topics, such as: "Sewing is a useful and enjoyable hobby," or "Motorcycle riding is not dangerous if the driver takes care." After class discussion, students write their thesis statements, making sure that there are three sound points for support. The statements, which are approved by the teacher, are brought to class on the test day and stapled to the final essays.

We are still working on grading procedures, but generally speaking, failure to follow directions, inclusion of four misspelled words or two sentence errors are cause for failure. Students may, however, use a grammar book and a dictionary in class. Slow students are allowed to return after school to finish if they need more time. In the basic classes, the teacher usually allows two class periods for the writing of the test.

We give a preliminary test in October to familiarize the students with the format. At this time the teachers often suggest statements dealing with the subject matter being studied. The preliminary test is used as a diagnostic tool by the teacher to pinpoint areas of weakness for individuals and for the class as a whole. The regular Sophomore Writing Test is given in January, and it is taken very seriously indeed. The students know that our superintendent, Dr. James Trost, is considering making the passing of this test a condition for graduation.

Last year in January sixty-three percent of the students passed. However, this is not the last chance. Since at RB, sophomores change English teachers at the end of the semester, the list of the students who failed the writing test is passed on to the next teacher. Additional help is given these students by a different teacher, and in March a second writing test is given. At that time the students who have demonstrated that they can write correctly are expected to write with more style. However, the same standards of correctness apply. There is an opportunity offered to those who fail the writing test the second time to retake it again in class.

If a student is unable during the sophomore year to show suffi-

cient skill to write a five-paragraph essay, he/she may pass into the junior year, if his/her other work is passing, but a letter is sent home to his/her parents, indicating this deficiency and suggesting tutorial help. This is still not the last chance.

In the junior year a practical writing test is given, also according to a five-paragraph format, but this time in the form of a letter of application for a job. This test has two purposes. First, it shows the practical application of the learned structure: a statement that the student is applying for a particular job, three reasons why the student would be good in this job (education, experience and/or personal qualifications, and references), and a conclusion. Secondly, because the structure is so clearly outlined and the vocabulary so simple, this test is easier for most students to write. Last year, the first year that the practical test was given, only five of the sixty students who had failed in the sophomore year did not pass in the junior year, two because of prolonged absence and three because of unfamiliarity with the English language, since they had been in this country only a year.

Teachers at Riverside Brookfield have observed a marked improvement in writing since the introduction of the writing test. The students can readily see that the same format in simplified form can be used in answering essay questions, that the same format expanded makes the backbone of the research paper. The serious preparation for this test and the long follow-up involved have made the students aware of the importance of care and correctness in writing. The greatest improvement has come in the writing of the students with the poorest skills to start with, since the definite structure gives them greater support and confidence.

In the senior year many students take Practical Communications, Business English, or Contemporary English. In these courses the emphasis is on directing communications outside the school through letters to editors, letters of complaints, the writing of résumés, and the filling in of application forms for work and school. We invite men and women from trucking companies, employment agencies, hospitals, automobile dealerships, and other places of business to come in to give practice interviews. When a businessman turns down a student because of misspelled words on an application form, the insistence on correctness makes more of an impression than when a teacher says the same thing.

We've all heard the line, "I just want to be an auto mechanic. Why do I have to spell 'receive' right?"

Tom Peck of Grange Dodge in La Grange gave the answer to

that. "If you're going to be sloppy filling out an application form, I'm going to suspect you'll be sloppy fixing cars. It takes sweat to learn to spell correctly, and I want a mechanic who isn't afraid to sweat."

Help for the Harried

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Sequence in composition has long been a problem for high school English teachers, experienced and inexperienced alike. Faced with several preparations, 150 students, study halls, cafeteria duty, and heavy responsibilities in literature and language study, they have seldom had adequate time to assign and evaluate papers, much less to plan and call for those papers in an order they thought desirable. Even for the most conscientious and committed, more often than not composition sequence has been a wish, not a reality.

Nor has the arrival of mini-courses in some schools eliminated or alleviated the problem. The demands of the past still remain — too many students, too many preparations, and too many extra-class responsibilities — and the new curriculum format has not magically imposed meaningful direction on those offerings designed to improve writing skills. In fact, with only a handful of weeks in which to focus on composition, many a harried teacher has doubtless looked to the heavens in despair, privately or publicly proclaiming that "Gee, there's so much that can be done! I just don't know which way to go or which materials to use!"

Help exists, however. And while the heavens do not provide it, it comes nonetheless in most bountiful amounts. Key among the available assistance is that which publishing houses can provide. The Silver Burdett Company has products with perhaps the greatest potential. Six of the ten modules making up that company's Contemporary English Modules Series center on composition, and collectively as well as individually they are generally effective. Although grade designations do not appear on any of the volumes, it is possible to use one at each level of the high school program, 7 through 12. Conversely, the paperbound books, each consisting of about 75 pages, are adaptable enough to fit comfortably into other curriculum formats, including mini-courses.

The Art of Composition, by Barbara Pannwitt, is probably the best-done of the six volumes, all designed for students of average ability. Consisting of twenty-one lessons, plus "Composition Workshop," six composition-stimulating situations, in eighty readable and heavily illustrated pages, the book takes students through a sequence emphasizing paragraphing, point-of-view, and creativity. *Teacher's Guide: Composition*, a paperback which provides lesson plans for every volume in the series, is an additional feature that can assist in the development of sequences appropriate for mini-course programs.

Although not specifically designed for use in such programs, *Developing Writing Skills*, written by William W. West and published by Prentice-Hall, has nonetheless enjoyed excellent success in them. West is an experienced writer of high school materials, and nowhere is his expertise more evident than in this hardcover volume, the second edition of which appeared in 1973. Eleven of its thirteen chapters treat forms of writing (for example, personal narrative, description, and opinion), and each form is presented in a prescribed sequence. In a very real sense, then, the book outlines eleven sequentially focused mini-courses in composition, each one of them culminating in a major writing assignment. Encouraging oral as well as written composition, the book takes an additional strength because of the teacher's manual that accompanies it.

Another approach to successful sequence in mini-courses in composition focuses upon sentence-combining, a technique for writing improvement that results from two research reports available from NCTE: John C. Mellon's *Transformational Sentence-Combining: A Method for Enhancing the Development of Syntactic Fluency in English Composition* (1969) and Frank O'Hare's *Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction* (1973). William Strong's *Sentence Combining: A Composing Book*, published by Random House in 1973, and O'Hare's *Sentencecraft: An Elective Course in Writing*, published by Ginn and Company in 1975, are both designed for use on the high school level. Equally important, each moves from easy sentence-combining exercises to difficult ones, thus providing a sequence that is pedagogically as well as linguistically defensible. There is no question that students who complete either paperback are more competent writers as a result of their efforts.

The secret to sensible sequences in mini-courses in composition does not lie with materials, however. It is teachers who possess it. Because they are the best judges of their students' needs and abilities, they are bound to be the best judges of what will work with and for those students. Textbooks can help, definitely; but,

as Jan A. Griffin suggests, textbooks can also be misused, hindering rather than encouraging growth in composition.[1] Teachers must constantly remind themselves of this point. Likewise, they must always stay alert to several other considerations important to effective composition sequence:

1. Sequence should be based on psychological rather than logical patterns of organization.
2. Sequence in written composition should be based on planned programs of oral language development.
3. Sequence should be based on what is known about the developmental characteristics of children.
4. Sequence should introduce students to the problems of expressing ideas in various forms.
5. Sequence in composition should provide for balanced and adequate attention to all important aspects of writing.[2]
6. Sequence in written composition must be premised on the belief that people learn to write by writing and that mastery of a grammatical system, even a linguistically based one, is not tantamount to mastery of written discourse.[3]

Finally, teachers striving for successful sequence in mini-courses in composition would be wise indeed to study (or restudy) three classic articles from *English Journal* which bear on their concerns, each by a name famous in composition-teaching circles: James M. McCrimmon's "A Cumulative Sequence in Composition" (LV: April, 1966, pp. 425-34); Alan D. Engelsman's "A Writing Program That Teaches Writing" (LVI: March, 1967, pp. 417-21, 442); and Ken Macrorie's "To Be Read" (LVII: May, 1968, pp. 686-92).[4]

For teachers of mini-courses in composition there is indeed help. They need only to avail themselves of it.

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[1] Jan A. Griffin. "Writing." *Creative Approaches to the Teaching of English*, edited by R. Baird Shuman. Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1974, pp. 133-65. Griffin provides a useful discussion of sequence in composition in a sub-section of this chapter: "Generative Writing," pp. 174-77.

[2] James R. Squire. "Five Rules for Sequence." *NEA Journal*, 53 (November, 1964), pp. 14-16.

[3] For a full discussion of this point, see R. W. Reising's "Back to Basics in Composition . . . Huh?" *Indiana English Journal*, 9 (Spring, 1975), pp. 16-18.

[4] The three articles also appear in *Teaching High School Composition*, edited by Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Writing and the Art of Thinking: A Neglected Area of Instruction

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It would seem to be both logical and obvious that one of the duties of the writing teacher is to show the vital connection between writing and rational discourse, between expression and thought. But the ideal is seldom realized, and in our system of public education, the demand to teach the mechanical part of writing and other basic disciplines has been so compelling that most instructional units fail to treat the logical/philosophical side of writing.

At the same time, many teachers in our high schools have been reluctant to get involved with questions of philosophical import or of logical form because they fear that these matters are too advanced for a high school level course, or believe that they can be touched upon only by opening up a kind of Pandora's box. Perhaps there is also a belief that the subject matter is so broad that very little of the ground could actually be covered. Frequently, too, English teachers feel themselves ill-prepared to deal with the logical side of writing because it is not a part of the traditional high school English curriculum.

Still, there are marvelous opportunities in this area for a learning experience that will be rewarding for both teacher and student. Obviously the high school English program is not the place for a full-scale course in formal logic; but it is possible to make a great deal of progress on a more modest level and still feel that the average student has come away with something solid. What follows is an attempt to provide a rudimentary ground plan of what might reasonably be covered in a high school English course without tumbling into a realm of vast technicality.

Writing and Thinking: A Topical Outline

To the teacher who is considering introducing a unit dealing with rational discourse or the art of making sense, I would suggest the following topics that can be covered in a relatively short period of time without getting involved in the technical terminologies of formal logic, philosophy, semantics, or whatever:

I. Kinds of Language
  - Informative
  - Emotive
  - Directive

II. Pitfalls of Language
  - Ambiguity
  - Equivocation
  - Vagueness

III. Definition
  - Kinds of Definition
  - Problems in Defining

IV. Making a Reasonable Argument
  - Knowledge vs. Prejudice
  - Dependable Generalizations
  - Fallacies in Reasoning
  - Fairness of Argument

If a larger amount of time were available, it might be possible to add materials on kinds of reasoning — inductive and deductive — logical relations, syllogisms, causation, and the scientific methods of thinking. But for a start the topics mentioned above ought to be quite sufficient to establish the important relationship between writing and rational discourse.

Introducing the Subject

In introducing this unit it could be pointed out to students that writing quite frequently differs from speaking or ordinary conversation in that the writer often tackles larger and more complex subjects that require *sustained* argument and therefore more precise use of language. Writing and thinking are tightly interconnected, and we cannot write clearly about a topic unless we have carefully thought it through. In conversing with our friends, in a casual sort of way, we can say "I think that A is the best candidate for President of the United States," or "Religion is on the Way Out in America Today." But when we get into topics such as this in any kind of depth, where we have to support and defend our ideas more rigorously, we see that we need to know a little about thinking, about methods of argument, about techniques for supporting our ideas. Can we really explain ourselves? Can we really make sense? Let's think a little more about the connection between writing and thinking, about the art of making sense.

Rich Fields for Discussion

I have suggested in the outline above what seem to me to be some fertile areas for classroom discussion. I shall not attempt to

explain them all in detail, but let us look at one or two of the areas and ways in which they might be used to stimulate the imaginations of high school students and add to their general stock of knowledge.

Consider the first of the topics I have listed above — the various levels of discourse. Quite often students don't stop to realize that language is used in a number of different ways that are quite distinct — that the language of the poet is different from that of the scientist, which in turn is quite different from that of the advertising man or politician.

To be sure, the various functions of language blend into one another, but for practical purposes one can get a good deal of mileage out of making the distinction between informative, expressive or directive language. That is, students can be made to see that language can be used to communicate some kind of information, to express feelings, or to get people to act or respond in some particular way.

Many times disagreements and fruitless arguments take place in human experience because people fail to understand that different kinds of language have these different functions or ends. The very literal scientific mind, for example, might read Shelley's lines on the skylark

> Hail to thee blithe spirit!
> Bird thou never wert,

and jump to the mistaken conclusion that the skylark was not a bird. But the poet does not use language as a means of conveying information; his intent is to create a mood or essence.

On the other hand, we may mistakenly believe that all ideas outwardly garbed in neutral, informative language are strictly informative in intent. But this is certainly not always the case. Consider the sociologist or criminologist who writes what appears to be a strictly factual report about conditions in a prison. Such a report might present population figures, data about physical plant and layout, and other such seemingly neutral factual information. Yet his purpose in writing may not be so bland and neutral as it appears. He may be emotionally quite involved in what he is writing so that his "scientific paper" has much of the emotional or expressive in it, although he may deny this to himself. Too, he may be writing in such a way as to instill a certain attitude in his readers, to impel them to action.

There are countless opportunities for discussion of this topic. Students will almost certainly get a great deal of enjoyment and intellectual satisfaction out of analyzing the language of political

oratory, or of television commercials. Is this language doing what on the surface it seems to be doing, or are there hidden motives, hidden levels of meaning? At the same time, the kinds of awareness that are developed in studying the various kinds of discourse can be put to good use elsewhere in the curriculum. Sometimes it will be very helpful in the study of literature, for example. A class studying Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar,* might make a philosophical analysis of Mark Antony's funeral oration. Traditionally English teachers have spent much time talking about the literary qualities of this speech, or about the ironies, or about individual techniques of invoking emotional response. But it may also be worthwhile to discuss the overall function of the speech, its hidden intentions, the shifting grounds of meaning.

Once students are aware of the various ways language functions and are accustomed to making more rigorous analyses of these functions, they will discover that the resulting awareness will be useful throughout the entire range of their educational experience; indeed, the high generality and abstractness of the logical outlook is the largest part of its appeal and usefulness.

But let's look at another topic area taken from the outline above — the subject of the quality of arguments used to support a point of view. Students will benefit greatly by being taught something about the kinds of support that can honestly be given to uphold their argument or point of view. They can be profitably taught the difference between knowledge and prejudice; they can be taught to see whether causal statements really hold or are merely asserted; they can be taught the difference between a safe and shaky generalization. All of this can be applied very profitably to the teaching of writing. Consider the following paragraph from a student essay.

> Juvenile delinquency is a major problem in this country. This problem became more serious after World War II. The war itself is one of the causes. Parents of youngsters born during these years either avoided their responsibility or were unable to maintain it. Everywhere we read about the vicious crimes committed by young people. During the war the newspapers and the movies depicted violence, cruelty and bloodletting as heroic rather than vicious. The war inspired brutality by distorting and twisting humane values. It is no wonder that the younger generation has made a problem of itself. During the war many of them had fathers who were in the service; their mothers were working in war plants. Consequently, they were unhappy and undisciplined. Many of them are now organized in gangs and proud of their devotion to the life of crime.[1]

[1] *Prentice-Hall Handbook for Writers,* Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1965, p. 205.

This paragraph appears in a standard writing textbook to illustrate lack of coherence in the paragraph. And, to be sure, it illustrates this point quite well — the sentences flow together poorly; there are too many starts and breaks. But the student who has seriously undertaken to evaluate arguments will also see more wrong with a paragraph like this than coherency or the development of ideas. He will see something wrong with the quality of ideas. He will see a distinct weakness in argument — a cause and effect relationship announced but never proved; weak and unsubstantiated generalizations. Discussions of the quality of thinking in a piece of writing can give rise to stimulating and highly beneficial class discussions.

Adequacy of generalization invariably turns out to be a pivotal point in discussing the rationality of themes, but the teacher will find that students at the high school level will respond enthusiastically to discussions of the various informal fallacies of reasoning such as begging the question, the either-or fallacy, false analogy, *argumentum ad hominem* (attacking the man rather than his ideas), etc. None of these fallacies is hard to grasp; teaching students about them is fairly simple, and the kind of class discussion that arises from studying examples can hardly fail to be intellectually challenging, since if the nature of human reason can't be made intellectually challenging, what can?

Preparation of the Teacher

For the teacher who is interested in introducing this angle of writing into his classroom, there are several books which introduce the topic in a relatively nontechnical manner. *The Art of Making Sense* by Lionel Ruby (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott) is lucid, charming, and packed with very usable illustrations. Somewhat more technical perhaps, and less readable, but sound and interesting, is *Thinking Straight* by Monroe C. Beardsley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.). Needless to say, traditional college rhetoric books, such as Brooks and Warren's *Modern Rhetoric* have chapters or sections dealing with reasoning, evidence, definition, fallacies, etc. But a teacher planning to introduce the art of reasoning to his students would immensely profit by working through volumes like those of Ruby or Beardsley. After doing so it should be easy to work up supporting material of one's own from the daily newspaper or television screen. And since this subject area should also be stimulating to students, the teacher may shortly find that students will enthusiastically generate their own supporting material.

Confessions of a Poetry Addict Unsure of How She Got That Way

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Until this evening, I believe that I have never thought about reasons for liking poetry. Suddenly, however, I am struck with the idea that I surely didn't enter the world with this addiction. I had to acquire it. But HOW? and WHERE? and WHY? and WHEN?

Like you, I remember suffering through courses in junior and senior high school with requirements sufficient to cause anyone, even a poetry-lover, to ease away, never to return to a line of verse. Long hours (or so they seemed) were spent in wondering whether or not to mark a half-beat at the end of a line which seemed already ended, of trying to settle for iambic or trochaic, of "checking out" the teacher to decide what she had decided the poet had meant in a particular poem under discussion. I remember, too, my first attempts at writing verse, not school assignments but my own, especially after a very important event in my life. such as the wedding of my fourth-grade teacher, the most beautiful woman I knew. I found those lines not long ago in our farm attic folded away with several rejection slips from household magazines whose editors encouraged me to continue to send any other poems while informing me that this one wasn't appropriate.

But, what brought on the romance?

First, my mother is responsible, for it was she who sang or "told me" poems from my earliest days. When I was a preschooler, I memorized short verses line by line just from hearing her say them slowly while we were dusting or doing some other task together. She still delights audiences and me with her word-by-word renditions of Wordsworth and Browning (memorization was "in" in her day). She has worked the same poetry magic on her grandsons.

Beth Stiffler is the chairperson of the I.A.T.E. judging committee appointed to select the best poetry written this year by Illinois secondary school students.

My next memories of poetry are my reading silently all I could get, good and bad (although I didn't know that). I read them aloud, too, in the quiet of my bedroom and enjoyed listening to the rise and fall of my voice. I learned to grow breathless with "By the shores of Gitchee Goomee"; to cry a little with Annabel Lee; and to imagine myself the black-eyed Bess with a rose in my hair waiting for the "tlot-tlot." Then, came high school, and the English teacher made us memorize Bryant's "To a Waterfowl" and the mercy speech from *Merchant of Venice*. I really didn't mind memorizing, but I hated having to sit and listen while all twenty-six members of the class took a turn at standing before the group to recite.

With college came a different look at poetry. One delightful old warrior, who bicycled out to Breadloaf each summer to sit at the feet of Robert Frost, made us love her hero through playing his recordings. How thrilled I was to hear him read his poems the first time, and, thereafter, I thrilled again, each time, to his slow, rolling speech, simple and dignified. Another beloved professor always turned balladeer when we "did" the early British poetry; he changed from the stereotyped instructor, turned up the jacket collar of his old salt and pepper suit, plucked his mandolin in accompaniment to whiskey tones, and enthralled his audience with the bawdy narratives. He always wrote poems for his students' birthdays, for holidays, and I even have one of his verses for the birth of each son.

Entwined in this chronological review are also the common songs, the rollicking poems with a strong rhythm which we have as children and adolescents enjoyed around the campfire; the jingling commercials and appealing themes of popular radio, movie, and television broadcasts; the heart-warming school, state, and other loyalty songs of college days; and the working and worshipping songs of groups such as cowboys, Negroes, and the Armed Forces. The words of those songs are important, poetry which refreshes the memory at odd moments throughout life.

With each son I delighted in watching the baby reaction to the vowel sounds in rhymes; the infant response to the rollicking rhythm of repetition; the childish laughter at the silliness of nonsense verse. The oldest boy once spent his vacation money for a book of poems while on a shopping trip to St. Louis. I remember, too, typing their childish attempts at verse as they spoke them and then reading those lines over and over until they could recite them as they pretended to "read" from a book of poems we had

made. One son loved words so much that he read signs above stores backward and tried to rhyme as he went.

My first teaching experience was to assist a master second-grade teacher who gathered the pupils around her on the floor each afternoon after lunch for a poetry hour. She simply began reciting poetry and they automatically joined in when they wished, and they usually wished to do so at once. She knew and loved the good poets and brought Vachel Lindsay, Walt Whitman, and Carl Sandburg to these young children. She made a poetry book for each child, and they delighted in selecting the "next poem" to read with the class. Her pleasure spilled over, and these young children moved on to the next activity, refreshed.

The approach to poetry at the eighth, ninth, and eleventh grades was for me different from that of the earlier years; yet the response was much the same. As in university teaching to students in the humanities, I have felt a great responsibility to help them to enjoy poetry, to build again the desire to find pleasure in verse. Sometimes they must learn again to use their senses, emotions, and imagination, as well as their intelligence, to comprehend. For those who are more serious in their study, I have tried to point out appropriate methods of studying poetry and its body of research. For some, it has seemed easy to move to trying their hand at writing verse. Sometimes this occurs before I ask, and this is a real bonus. Writing good poetry involves hard work, often frustration, and long hours spent in revision. I believe it unfair to give a student the impression that writing poetry is easy; I try to treat his efforts with great respect. Finding an extra poem in your mailbox or under the door (one that you didn't assign) makes the effort worthwhile.

I know that you understand the feeling too. Will you, then, encourage and help your students to write poems for the spring competition of high school poetry in the State of Illinois as sponsored by the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. Past issues of the *English Bulletin* devoted to the best high school poetry of the State carry sufficient evidence to support our belief and faith in the young poets of Illinois.

As I look back on my reasons for becoming addicted, I realize, and know that you do too, that I really didn't do much of anything to become addicted . . . someone else did it for me, and it was happening all the time.

Illinois Author of the Year 1976: Victor Hicken, Historian

AWARD PRESENTATION SPEECH
GIVEN BY TAIMI RANTA
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY
AT NORMAL

In this Bicentennial Year, the Honorary Awards Committee deemed it fitting and proper that it search for a person who had earned laurels both as a historian and as an author. Dr. Victor Hicken is such a person. He is truly worthy of being honored in this Bicentennial Year as the "Illinois Author of the Year" by the Illinois Association of Teachers of English.

Professor Hicken is a man with deep roots in this state. He was born in central Illinois in the town of Witt on September 28, 1921, and was educated in the Gillespie public schools. His B.Ed. degree was earned at Southern Illinois University in 1943. From 1943 to 1946, he served in the United States Naval Reserve with the rank of lieutenant, junior grade. At the University of Illinois, he received his degrees of M.A. in 1947 and Ph.D. in 1955, both in American history. Dr. Hicken has specialized in the Civil War, the Reconstruction, and military history. In 1947, he joined the faculty of Western Illinois University, where he has distinguished himself both as a teacher and an administrator.

Dr. Hicken is an outstanding researcher and writer. *Illinois in the Civil War,* first published in 1966 by the University of Illinois Press, is now in its second printing under the auspices of the State Historical Society. For this work, Dr. Hicken was presented the Award of Merit from the Association of State and Local History. His *The American Fighting Man,* published in 1969 by Macmillan, was a social history of the American soldier from the days of the American Revolution to the present. It gained national attention in the pages of *Newsweek.* In his *The Purple and the Gold,* published in 1970 by Western Illinois University, Dr. Hicken traced the history of his institution. *The World Is Coming to an End: An Irreverent Look at Modern Doomsaying,* published in 1975 by Arlington House, was a study of the 1960's. Dr.

The Illinois Author of the Year Award is presented annually by the Illinois Association of Teachers of English at the Fall Conference. Dr. Victor Hicken received the 1976 Award at the Banquet Session on October 29 at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

Hicken has been working on a series of mini-biographies for the junior high school, entitled *A Gallery of American Heroes*. Three are now published, the last two in 1976. The listing of all his writings covers many pages, and the titles would be far too numerous to include in this brief account of his accomplishments. May it suffice to say that his pen has not been idle.

The year of 1976 has been memorable for Dr. Hicken in a number of ways. He has been the President of the Illinois Historical Society, having been chosen by the members of this organization because they felt that a distinguished state historian ought to preside over the society during the Bicentennial Year. Also in 1976, Dr. Hicken was elected by a Western Illinois University faculty committee to occupy the chair of "Distinguished Professor." This singular honor was bestowed on him because he was considered to best fulfill the requirements of the award, those of writing and research deemed worthy of significance by important historians across the nation, excellent performance in the classroom as indicated by the "Outstanding Teacher" designation in 1964 and the appointment as Annual Faculty Lecturer (first to receive this honor) in 1969, and outstanding activity in state and local affairs.

Dr. Hicken and his wife Mary have four children--Jeff, now a practicing lawyer in Minnesota; Brian, who is employed in New York City; Elizabeth, a sophomore at Cornell College in Iowa; and Dan, a senior at Macomb High School.

In spite of all his accomplishments and honors, Dr. Hicken is very modest, a gentleman of tradition. He is considered a great friend, a respected colleague, and an inspiring teacher. He is also the very proud new grandfather of Andrew Victor. When approached about accepting this honor, he said, "Who wouldn't accept a second grandchild?"

The Illinois Association of Teachers of English salutes Victor Hicken as its 1976 Illinois Author of the Year.

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